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Workshops Help Farmers Tell Media about Fun on the Farm

By Tennessee Department of Agriculture

Three workshops slated for August in locations across the state aim to help agritourism farmers learn more about working with media.

The workshops, conducted by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA), are scheduled for August 21 at Ellington Agricultural Center in Nashville; August 27 at the West Tennessee Research and Education Center in Jackson; and August 30 at Walters State Community College in Morristown.

Participation in a workshop also qualifies Tennessee agritourism operators for an increased percentage of reimbursement for projects approved as part of the Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program (TAEP). The program offers the Tennessee's agritourism farmers a 35 percent cost share up to \$10,000 for pre-approved projects; that percentage is increased to 50 percent up to \$15,000 for operators who attend the media training event. The increased cost share applies to any University of Tennessee or Tennessee Department of Agriculture educational agritourism session, including attendance at previous workshops and conferences.

Agritourism is a relatively new term used to describe a wide variety of farm-related activities, products and services meant to attract visitors to farms. Typical Tennessee agritourism activities include "pick-your-own" farms, corn mazes,

pumpkin patches, farm tours, on-farm gift shops and wineries that use Tennessee grown products. Tennessee currently has more than 500 agritourism and direct marketing venues.

"We want to give our agritourism operators the tools they need to work successfully with local media," says Pamela Bartholomew, TDA Market Development agritourism coordinator. "It's important to build good relationships with the people who can tell your story to the public and build your business. All farmers need to understand their own industry, but agritourism farmers also need to understand the media industry in order to present themselves and their farms in a positive, effective way."

The workshops are offered at no cost to agritourism producers. Each media training workshop begins at 9 a.m. and ends at 3 p.m. Lunch is provided.

"By completing the media training," says Bartholomew, "a producer will be better able to speak to a crowd about an agritourism operation, educate others about what agritourism is, what types of activities are available in Tennessee, and of course to speak to the media and answer questions."

"We'll help producers define and refine their operation's 'message'" says Bartholomew; "You can't 'stay on message' with the media until you've thought about what that message is. We'll teach what a sound byte is and what the

interviewer is looking for when he asks you for one. We'll help you think about what sort of image a potential customer is looking for in a farmer and farm experience, and how you can project that image."

"Local media want to be seen as committed to and serving their communities by bringing attention to area events and businesses," says Bartholomew. "Agritourism venues and their local media can have a mutually beneficial relationship—but you have to give them information and images they can use."

"Some of the best advertising your farm can get is the kind you can't buy," says the specialist. "We'll give you ideas on how to get media attention and then build lasting relationships with those local people who make a big difference in how often and how well word gets out about all the fun people can have on your farm."

For more information about the workshops, contact Bartholomew at Pamela.Bartholomew@state.tn.us or (615) 837-5348. Register for an upcoming workshop by calling (615) 837-5160. For more information about Tennessee agritourism, the Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program or to learn more about Tennessee farm products, visit www.picktnproducts.org.

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Agritourism in Action: Donnell Century Farm

Rose Ann Donnell
Donnell Century Farm
 Madison County
<http://donnellcenturyfarm.com>

What products or attractions do you offer?

Donnell Century Farm offers group tours and Saturday festivals in the Spring and Fall. Tours are primarily for elementary school children, however, church groups, birthday parties, Girl Scout troops, business groups with families and baseball teams all visit the farm.

Tours include several learning centers. The farm basket activity has students milk a wooden cow, dig a potato, pick an apple, etc. Then students deliver and sell their goods at a farmers market. In the "Little Sprouts" activity, students plant soybeans in a special medium placed in a small baggie and wear them next to their skin to sprout the beans. The animal exhibit features a goat walk, donkeys and several other animals. Germ City helps students learn how to wash their hands effectively. Tours typically end with lunch and video in the barn loft.

Festivals such as the 2007 Wilbur the Pig Day include tour activities and other themed activities. Rose Ann lets her creativity shine with activities such as hog squealing, pig calling and pigtail princess contests.

How long have you been in business?

The operation has been in business for five years.

Why did you get into agritourism?

Rose Ann has a mission to educate children about agriculture that stems from her days in the Farm Bureau's Young Farmers and Homemakers. "They used to tell

us," Rose Ann said, "If you don't tell the story of agriculture, who will? It's what I want to do!"

She has realized, through the amount of time and financial resources she and her family has expended, that she needs to consider the business end of the operation. The agritourism enterprise needs to add income to the farm just as other traditional livestock and crop enterprises need to add income to the farm.

What is unique about the operation?

Donnell Century Farm has been in operation for 150 years and is still a working farm today. Rose Ann focuses on the quality of educational programs offered and creates unique agricultural themed activities for farm visitors.

Has the operation been successful?

Rose Ann says that her enterprise has been a success. She measures her success through the thanks she receives from parents and teachers who tell her that she has taught their children things they did not know before about agriculture. Teachers find value in bringing their students to the farm.

To what do you attribute your success?

"Passion!" was Rose Ann's immediate answer to this question. She added that the support of her family as well as growing the business slowly has attributed to the operation's success.

What have been your biggest challenges?

At the moment, Rose Ann is being challenged by how to layout the activities to allow groups to flow through the enterprise smoothly.

Rose Ann has also been challenged by the marketing

aspect of the operation. She said in the beginning she "didn't know what I was doing. What works?" She is learning marketing is important. "If they don't know about the farm, they won't come." She is also learning to "let go of some money" to advertise using methods that will reach her target market.

How do you market your operation?

Rose Ann has tried several types of promotion strategies. In the past, she advertised in the local newspaper and submitted events to the newspaper calendar and a special entertainment section in the Thursday edition. This year she developed "rack cards" for her educational tours and mailed them to area schools – she found addresses on-line. She is also placing six ads in the "Parent and Family Magazine," which she says reaches her market for Saturday festival goers. Rose Ann has taken her wooden milk cow to events and to a television station for a segment on the morning show. In addition, she has donated a birthday party as an auction item for a school fundraiser and utilizes road side signs near the farm.

What are your goals for the future?

Rose Ann would like to increase the number of farm visitors. She is working on finding a way to lay out the tour to accommodate more people. She is also focusing on improving her marketing efforts.

What advice do you have for other agritourism operators or farmers interested in agritourism?

"You need to want to do it because you like it," says Rose Ann. "It is too hard—too much work. You have to love people and your purpose."



Market Minute: Handling Customer Complaints

A study released in May 2006 revealed that more than half of agritourism enterprise visitors were repeat customers. This statistic underscores the importance of providing excellent customer service to try to make every customer a repeat customer. Remember it costs three to five times more to earn a new customer than it does to keep an existing customer.

No matter what quality of service provided, however, agritourism entrepreneurs will face complaints from at least some customers. Handling customer complaints can be frustrating and time consuming, but handling

those complaints with care can help turn a negative situation into a positive one.

Here are a few tips to help you handle customer complaints.

- Treat the customer with respect and never argue.
- Try not to take the complaint personally.
- Remain calm.
- Be patient, listen closely and do not interrupt the customer.
- Do not make excuses.
- Do not quote policies and rules.
- Be understanding. Use phrases such as "I understand," "I will address that right away," "You have a right to feel

that way," and "I am sorry that happened."

- Thank customers for bringing the problem to your attention.
- Indicate that you want to help.
- Be creative in finding a mutually beneficial solution if at all possible. Ask for the customer's assistance in reaching a satisfactory solution.
- Write down the solution you and the customer agree upon then take action immediately. Follow-up with the customer to confirm the solution was satisfactory.
- Instruct employees to call a supervisor if they are having a problem handling a customer complaint.



Adapted from Ramay Winchester and Lee Curtis, Tennessee Department of Tourist Development, *One Visitor/Customer at a Time Hospitality Training Program*, April 2002

Learn more about **customer service** in *Agritourism in Focus: A Guide for Tennessee Farmers* available on-line at <http://cpa.utk.edu>

Save the Date: 2008 Agritourism Conference

The Tennessee Agritourism Initiative partners will be hosting their 3rd Agritourism: Cultivating Farm Revenue Conference Thursday and Friday **January 17-18, 2008**. The conference will be held in West Tennessee at **Paris Landing State Park**.

The conference will once again feature educational sessions, a trade show, and the annual meeting of the

Tennessee Agritourism Association. Network with agritourism operators from around the state and the nation (14 states were represented at the 2007 conference).

Conference details will be made available in the next few months and will be posted on the Center for Profitable Agriculture's Web site at <http://cpa.utk.edu>

Learn more about Paris Landing State Park, the 2008 conference location, by visiting the park's Web site: <http://state.tn.us/environment/parks/ParisLanding/>

Information and materials from the 2007 conference is available on-line at <http://cpa.utk.edu/level2/agri-tourism/2007agritourconf/index.htm>

Upcoming Events

Tennessee Agritourism Association Meeting

Monday, August 13
11a.m. Central
Wildwood Stables
Crossville (Fairfield Glade), TN
Contact Vera Ann Myers for more information at verann@xtn.net

I-40 exit 322, turn toward Fairfield Glade, from Peavine Road turn on Chestnut Hill Road and go 8 miles. Wildwood Stables is located on your left, at the

corner of Chestnut Hill and Westchester

Regional Agritourism Workshops

9am to 3pm
August 21 – Nashville
August 27 – Jackson
August 30 – Morristown
Contact Pamela Bartholomew at Pamela.Bartholomew@state.tn.us or (615) 837-5348

Christmas Tree Grower Field Day

8:30am to 3pm
September 15 – Crossville, TN
Pre-registration \$12
On-site registration \$15
Contact tctga@citlink.net

2008 TN Agritourism Conference

January 17-18, 2008
Paris Landing State Park

Programs in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, family and consumer sciences and resource development. University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and county governments cooperating. UT Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.